

**To:** #whsr@nsc.eop.gov[#whsr@nsc.eop.gov]  
**From:** Eoc, Epahq  
**Sent:** Sun 8/9/2015 12:36:07 PM  
**Subject:** Fw: EOC Spot Report: Update #2, Region 8, Abandoned Mine Release into Animas River; San Juan County, CO

Rick--Per our conversation. Please let me know that you received this email. Good to talk to you. Patrick

Patrick Easter, Senior Watch Officer  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Headquarters Emergency Operations Center  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, DC 20004  
202-564-3850 202-564-8729 (fax)  
<mailto:eoc.epahq@epa.gov>

---

**From:** Easter, Patrick  
**Sent:** Saturday, August 8, 2015 2:46 PM  
**To:** Eoc, Epahq  
**Subject:** EOC Spot Report: Update #2, Region 8, Abandoned Mine Release into Animas River; San Juan County, CO

**NOTE: Due to EPA Remote Email Access issues, I am sending this email from my EPA email rather than from the EOC Mailbox. Apologies for any confusion this may cause.**

**This report is being sent as a bcc to prevent accidental Reply to All messages.**

**UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**



**EOC Spot Report: Update #2, Region 8, Abandoned Mine Release into Animas River; San Juan County, CO**

**US Environmental Protection Agency**

**Report as of 1400 EDT on 8/8/2015**

**Overview:** On August 5th, an EPA and Colorado State Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety team was working to investigate and address contamination at the abandoned Gold King Mine in San Juan County, CO. This work resulted in a large release of mine wastewater into the upper portions of Cement Creek. Initial estimates indicate that the release is approximately one million gallons that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach and all were unharmed.

The acidic mine water associated with this release contains high levels of sediment and metals. EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations and will be monitoring river conditions. EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes. The water in Cement Creek and the Animas River in Silverton is clearing.

Water continues to be released from the mine at a slower rate. The discharge flow rate from the mine will be confirmed. R8 continues building settling ponds for this mine water and will divert it to the ponds for treatment with caustic soda and flocculent. EPA has met with San Juan County officials and will be meeting with La Plata County officials later today. Water sampling is being conducted and analysis will be forthcoming including pH levels and other water quality parameters.

**State, Local and other Federal Agency Actions:** San Juan County officials are engaged in the response activities. State officials are also on scene. Following the release, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) notified water users downstream so they could take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes. The Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Office is monitoring effects on wildlife and aquatic life in the affected area.

The La Plata County Sheriff issued an order closing the Animas River to all watercraft from the north County line (San Juan County, Colorado) to the south County line (at the Colorado/New Mexico State line) until further notice. Furthermore, all such watercraft must be removed from the Animas River within the locations cited above. The decision was made after consultation with the EPA, CDPHE, the San Juan Basin Health Department, and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. The Order will remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe.

R8 has contacted the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Department of Interior about this incident.

**EPA Actions:** A R8 OSC met with San Juan County leaders to discuss the release. R8 requested support from EPA's Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology (ASPECT) aircraft. The ASPECT plane completed a preliminary overflight to determine how far downstream the release has traveled and flew from the New Mexico border to the mine to take photographs. ASPECT will fly each morning to determine the leading edge of the pulse, report that location and collect photographic images.

R8 staff are coordinating with relevant county and city officials. EPA teams are sampling and investigating downstream locations to confirm that the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users. EPA is coordinating with ATSDR in response to public health concerns/questions associated with the mine waste plume. ATSDR has been in communication with local health officials at San Juan Basin Health Department in Colorado.

R8 staff met with the Durango City Engineer to analyze and implement measures to protect the Durango drinking water supply. The R8 Regional Administrator flew to Durango on Friday and will meet OSCs and local officials, and will tour affected sections of the Animas River. He also attend a public meeting on the incident on Friday afternoon.

R8 is also be assessing damage near the mine portal and any residual releases of water at the mine site. Baseline water quality data from the past 17 years has been obtained and will be compared with the new water quality data.

Region 8 is coordinating with Region 6 and Region 9 and the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, the Southern Ute Tribe and Navajo Nation. Region 6 is working closely with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to evaluate possible impacts in New Mexico. Potentially impacted water systems have been notified and precautions are in place to ensure drinking water in homes is protected. Two R6 OSCs and two drinking water specialists are deploying to New Mexico. EPA and NMED are providing assistance to community water systems and closely monitoring the situation. Region 9 is deploying an OSC and coordinating with the Navajo Nation as well as Utah. All three Regions have Public Information Officers in this coordinated response.

**Media Interest:** Medium

<http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/orange-waste-from-colorado-mine-creeps-toward-new-mexico/ar-BBIsV44?ocid=ansnewsap11>

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/07/us/colorado-epa-mine-river-spill-irpt/index.html>

[http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci\\_28601566/animas-river-spill-leaves-durango-officials-edge-waiting](http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28601566/animas-river-spill-leaves-durango-officials-edge-waiting)

**The HQ EOC will continue to monitor and provided updates as needed.**

**UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

Patrick Easter, Watch Officer

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Headquarters Emergency Operations Center

1200 Pennsylvania Ave

Washington, DC 20004

202-564-3850

<mailto:eoc.epahq@epa.gov>